

In California, a 'Republican infection' blamed for budget woes

State lawmakers break logjam over budget, pass bills with 'supermajority' vote

By David Edwards and Stephen C. Webster

[The Raw Story](#): When California Republicans [replaced the state's senate minority leader](#) for siding with Democrats over a budget conflation, ultimately delaying the deal by a single vote after weeks of frantic negotiations, that was a step too far for Lt. Governor John Garamendi.

Accusing the state's GOP of attempting to shut down the government, in the vein of the [Gingrich-led federal shutdown of 1995](#), Garamendi said Wednesday to MSNBC anchor Contessa Brewer that California's budget crisis was caused by "a Republican infection."

State lawmakers early Thursday passed a fiscal plan aimed at closing the state's \$42 billion budget deficit, which threatened a financial meltdown in the world's eighth-largest economy.

The budget package passed after Republican Abel Maldonado agreed to support the measures in exchange for changes to California's electoral law and the removal from the plan of a 12-cent-per-gallon hike in the gasoline tax.

Lawmakers began voting on a series of 33 budget bills shortly after midnight and completed their approval at 6:55 a.m. -- four minutes after sunrise.

The support allowed the budget measure to pass 27 to 12, giving Democrats the two-thirds majority necessary to approve the bill.

The plan calls for nearly 13 billion dollars in new taxes and more than 15 billion dollars in spending cuts that Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said were necessary to prevent California's economy from "going off a cliff."

"Rather than approaching this unprecedented crisis with gimmicks and temporary solutions, we took the difficult but responsible steps to address our entire 42 billion dollar budget deficit," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

"I look forward to partnering with the people to make sure these bipartisan reform measures are passed, to put an end to our budget roller coaster and get California moving forward again."

California is the only US state that requires a so-called "super majority" to both pass a budget and approve any new taxes. "It is a major roadblock to any new progress," said the Lt.

Governor. "And then, when you have recalcitrant Republicans that have taken a no new tax pledge and seem to really just want to throw this state, and the nation, into chaos and further decline in the economy. Then, we have the gridlock that we see now.

"We need to change our constitution, go to maybe a 55 percent vote. And we need to make sure these Republicans are held accountable for the continued layoffs in California, for the shutdown of construction projects and for this state being on the brink."

The Lt. Governor also criticised Gov. Schwarzenegger, a Republican, for "failed leadership."

"He spent five years saying no new taxes, the problem is spending," said Garamendi. "Last summer he came to realize that really we do have a revenue problem ... But he never took that message to the public and he certainly didn't work with individual legislators."

The Lt. Governor pronounced California's economic woes a symptom of "a Republican infection that's really spreading across this nation."

Gov. Schwarzenegger is expected to sign the package into law on Friday.

State officials had warned California's budget deficit could reach 42 billion dollars by 2010, and were on the verge of halting hundreds of construction projects and slashing up to 10,000 jobs if a budget was not passed.

California has an unemployment rate of 9.3 percent, much worse than the US national average.

This video is from MSNBC, broadcast Feb. 18, 2009.